



**General Certificate of Education**

**Health and Social Care  
8626/8629**

**HC12      Human Development**

**Report on the Examination**

*2008 examination – June series*

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## **HC12 Human Development Principal Examiner's Report**

### **General comments**

Candidates' responses ranged across nearly the full mark range available.

In some centres it was evident that candidates had been well prepared, with differences in performance probably reflecting differences in the candidates' own efforts and abilities.

However, there was a significant number of centres in which all candidates performed very poorly. This might be because all the candidates lacked the motivation and/or aptitude to work at this level, or because they did not have effective guidance in their learning.

There was widespread evidence of the misunderstanding of terminology found in the paper, even though the same terminology is found in the specification.

Centres are reminded of the importance of teaching the content that is set out in the specification.

Many of the weaker candidates who did show some knowledge of child development performed badly because they did not address the questions. Instead, they produced (or reproduced) answers that were relevant to questions on similar topics in previous examination series. While practice with past papers is strongly recommended, candidates should be aware that the same questions are unlikely to appear each time.

Some candidates confused 'studies' (i.e. published pieces of empirical research) with theories, although this error did not occur so much as in previous series.

### **Question 1**

(a) A small majority of candidates described a relevant study supporting social learning theory (usually one of Bandura's). Many of these gained full marks. Some candidates described Skinner's research with pigeons, which did not receive credit. Possibly some candidates confused Learning theory with Social Learning Theory.

(b) Most candidates gained some marks, either for correctly identifying sex differences in behaviour or describing social learning theory. However, only a minority of candidates gave full and clear descriptions, covering reinforcement, modelling and the extraction of cognitions. Some candidates mistakenly included biological factors. Some candidates referred to parental choices of toys for their male and female children, but were not able to explain why this might lead to sex differences, and so did not receive credit. This point could be made relevant by suggesting that the child might extract the cognition that those toys must be ones appropriate for him/her.

(c) About half of candidates made appropriate criticisms, based on the failure of social learning theory to address biological factors. A number of candidates mistakenly assumed that the theory claimed that males ought to be treated differently from females. Some candidates thought that social learning theory referred to the social influence of parents only.

## Question 2

(a) A minority of candidates showed awareness of the learning theory explanation for attachment (the reinforcement of proximity by feeding etc.).

Some candidates gave irrelevant answers about stages in the development of attachment.

(b) Relatively few candidates addressed this question.

Instead of writing about the implications of Bowlby's theory for child rearing, (e.g. writing about what parents should do), they often described features of Bowlby's theory, and so gained only limited credit.

Quite a lot of candidates mistakenly thought that Bowlby insisted on the importance of the child's biological mother.

(c) A minority of candidates gained 5 or 6 marks for accurate outlines of parent-substitute arrangements.

Some candidates did not appear to be familiar with the term, and did not suggest day-care, fostering or adoption, although these are mentioned in the specification.

Some candidates misinterpreted this simple question completely and wrote about child-rearing styles instead.

(d)(i) There were some accurate descriptions of Tizard's study of parent-substitute arrangements. However, some candidates described irrelevant studies, such as Harlow's study of maternally-deprived monkeys, or Ainsworth's Strange Situation.

(d)(ii) Candidates who had outlined a relevant study, (e.g. Tizard or Kagan) in (d)(i), usually gained marks here, most commonly for criticising the rigidity of Bowlby's 'critical period'.

## Question 3

This question was the least well answered of the four.

(a) Most candidates gained marks for defining the superego.

(b) A number of candidates gained full marks for accurate accounts of the development of the superego. However, a surprising number failed to gain any marks on this straightforward question.

(c) Few candidates were able to evaluate Freud's theory of the development of the superego in terms of its explanatory power or its plausibility. There was widespread evidence that candidates did not know what was meant either by 'explanatory power' or 'plausibility', even though these terms are mentioned in the specification. For example, many candidates argued that Freud's account of the phallic stage was plausible.

Explanatory power refers to the applicability of a theory to different areas, for example different types of behaviour. So Freud's theory can be said to explain moral development, personality development and the development of sex differences in behaviour.

Candidates tended to do better when evaluating the theory in relation to research evidence.

(d) Few candidates were able to identify any implications of Freud's theory for child-rearing. As in question 2(b), it seemed that some candidates did not understand what 'implications for child rearing' meant.

#### **Question 4**

(a) There were some excellent descriptions of the role of assimilation and accommodation in the formation of new schemas.

Weaker answers showed a lack of understanding of these concepts, which were often confused with each other.

(b) Many candidates recognised that the object permanence test was relevant here, and full-mark descriptions of Piaget's test and other versions were common.

The most frequent error in descriptions of Piaget's test was to omit the fact that the child's attention is distracted before the toy is hidden.

Some candidates mistakenly stated that the child's attention should be on the toy at the moment it is concealed.

(c) Some candidates who correctly answered 4(b) failed to identify the stage of development this one-year-old child was likely to be in. A surprising number claimed that she would be in the pre-operational stage.

(d) There was widespread misunderstanding of this question about stage theory. As a result, candidates tended to produce answers to previous questions on Piaget's stage theory or tests. Many candidates assumed (mistakenly) that Piaget asserted that the stages were fixed to specific ages. In fact, Piaget's insistence was on the fixed sequence of the stages, and not on timing.

#### ***Grade boundaries***

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